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Secretary Muskie

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Following is an address by Secretary of State Edmund S. Muskie before the African-American Historical and Cultural Society and the World Affairs Council of Northern California in San Francisco, December 4, 1980.

I am grateful for the opportunity to address this distinguished gathering. As you are aware—as I am only too aware—we are in a period of transition. I am now called a "lame duck" Secretary of State. I don't feel lame. And my voice is still working just fine. I intend to keep using it—now, and also in the years to come.

Next month we will have a new President in Washington and a new Administration. They come to power in times of extraordinary challenge, both at home and abroad. They deserve the encouragement and support of all who love this country. They shall have mine.

It is in that spirit that I want to discuss today a subject that will be vitally important in the years ahead—American policy toward the nations and the peoples of Africa. It is an appropriate subject to discuss—indeed, a necessary one—in this time of transition. There are two reasons why that is true.

The first is the record of President Carter. I know the hazards involved in trying to select those current events that future historians will find to have been fateful. But I want to take that chance here. I suggest that the development of U.S. policy toward Africa—especially the steadfastness which helped make the Zimbabwe settlement possible—will one day be recorded among President Carter's finest achievements and also among the most significant international developments of this period.

What has been tested in our policy toward Africa might be called the pragmatic application of democratic ideals. And it has received a ringing vindication—in an enduring peace in Zimbabwe and a real improvement in our relations throughout the continent. So the first reason why I want to discuss Africa policy now is that we need to understand—outside of the heat of a campaign when we are beyond any motive either to belittle or to exaggerate—that something profoundly important is underway.

My second reason for discussing this subject is that if Africa policy has been an area of achievement for President Carter, it can just as much a source of opportunity for President Reagan.

We should not forget that the impetus for a more activist southern African policy, in assisting the independence process, had its roots in a Republican Administration. It was during the incumbency of President Ford that the United States first considered seriously the issue of Southern Rhodesia and judged that our energies should best be devoted to convincing an unrecognized, isolated regime to adhere to the principles of free elections.

As I will develop more fully in a few minutes, the new Administration has a special capacity, and a rare chance, to advance the cause of justice in Africa and build our relations there.

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Before defining that opportunity, let me describe some of the realities which have been our guideposts in Africa, and then outline the elements of the policy now in place.

Current Realities

It is dangerous to generalize about Africa. It is a complex of diverse cultures and traditions, countries that are comparatively wealthy and countries that are desperately poor. Experiences under different colonial powers have left a variety of legacies—some bitter, some of real value. But despite this diversity, there are a number of central realities which bear on our policy.

A first undeniable reality is that African nations are deeply important to the United States. We not only want, we need good relations with them. African nations are increasingly important to us economically, both as markets and as sources of critical materials. African actions are important politically. The 50 African countries make up nearly one-third of all the nations in the world. In the future they will play a growing part in determining whether humanity will be successful in addressing central challenges to our common future—to curb the spread of nuclear weapons, to curtail population growth, to ease hunger and disease, to manage the world's finite resources and guard them for generations to come.

African nations have another importance for Americans—one that is understood especially well by the African Cultural Heritage Society. For millions of our people, the tragedy of slavery severed the thread of personal history. As those bonds are gradually restored—and as long proud traditions are rediscovered—our own society, and all races, are the richer. So let us be absolutely clear on this point. Good relations with Africa are not only desirable; they are vital to our well-being.

A second reality that must concern us is that the people of Africa endure far more than their share of the world's suffering.

- Two-thirds of the world's most impoverished countries are in Africa.
- Africa has more refugees than any other region—more than 3 million people without homes, with little hope.
- Average nutritional standards in Africa are the lowest in the world, and they are getting worse.
- The natural resource base of Africa is threatened, as thousands of acres of farmland each year dry to desert.

The implications for people are clear. As they take a dreadful toll in human terms, these same conditions can also breed frustration and turmoil. And they make African societies vulnerable to pressures from outsiders seeking to exploit the suffering of Africans for ends of their own.

A third broad reality in Africa is a fierce determination to remain free from outside control. Nationalism, more than any ideology, shapes the dealings of African countries with the rest of the world.

This reality has a number of results. It means, for example, that while African nations need and seek assistance from outside, they are not likely to accept domination—from either West or East.

Nationalism also means we will see African societies evolving in their own ways, developing institutions appropriate to their own circumstances. They draw from their own histories and cultures, as well as from the experiences of both the West and the East.

These, in very brief summary, are some of the realities a sound policy toward Africa must accommodate—our own growing interests in Africa; the terrible poverty in many parts of Africa and the turmoil it can bring; the surpassing importance of nationalism in the policies of African nations. How do we address them?

Elements of U.S. Policy

I have described our policy as the pragmatic application of democratic ideals. To some that might sound like a hopeless contradiction in terms—references to pragmatism and to idealism in a single phrase. But there is no inconsistency here, for it is clearly the case in Africa that we advance our interests by giving concrete meaning and expression to our most basic values—the commitment to human freedom and advancement we share with the peoples of Africa. Our policy has been firmly grounded in that abiding commitment to freedom.

- Our policy strongly opposes racial injustice. In southern Africa we have given practical support to the evolution to majority rule. In Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, that meant resisting a premature, unilateral American breach of international sanctions and continuing the pressure for a true peace. In South Africa, it has meant broadening our own voluntary arms embargo and support for a mandatory U.N. embargo. Beyond that, it has meant a clear message to South Africa that our relations depend upon achieving racial justice—that other issues will not dilute our commitment on that fundamental cause.
- Our policy upholds the cause of peace. In Zimbabwe, in Namibia, on the Angola/Zaire border and elsewhere, the United States has been strongly identified with efforts to heal divisions and achieve peaceful solutions.
- Our policy in Africa has promoted respect for human rights. President Carter's human rights policy has found a special resonance in Africa. Human rights dialogues have been initiated in Dar es Salaam, Dakar, Sierra Leone, Cape Town, and Khartoum. Last year the Organization of African Unity adopted an African Declaration of Human Rights. In the broadest sense, the trend in Africa is clearly in the direction of greater democracy and freedom. Democracy is being restored in Nigeria and Ghana. Multiparty elections have resumed in Senegal and are expected in Uganda. And in some cases where there is only one party—as in Tanzania and Ivory Coast—there are numerous candidates for office, a growing acceptance of dissent, and expanded protection of individual political rights.
- Our policy has also been to support economic development in Africa and to forge new economic links. Since President Carter took office, American economic assistance to Africa has doubled, to more than $1 billion each year. Of course, it is still dwarfed by the need, but our aid has helped. And it has been concentrated on meeting the most urgent requirements of people, on easing their suffering, and on helping them become self-sufficient.
- And finally our policy supports African nationalism as the most dependable foundation for stable development and the strongest bulwark against outside intervention. Through the infusion of outside military means, the Soviets, the Cubans, and others have exploited and exacerbated a number of local and regional African conflicts. We have been, and must continue to be, responsive to the legitimate defense needs of African countries threatened by external pressures. Our security assistance to African nations has risen. But over the longer-term, we will most effectively counter Soviet designs by holding to our own affirmative course—seizing the moral initiative on racial justice; working for the settlement of conflicts others might exploit; helping to build the strength and confidence of African countries so they can better resist external pressures. Because we have done so, the striking difference between American and Soviet aims has become increasingly clear to the governments and people of Africa.

The approach I have outlined—a strategy grounded in principle as well as in interest—is working. We have been able to cement our ties with old friends, such as Ghana. And we have found measurable improvements in our relations with a number of key African countries —with Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea and Uganda, with Somalia, Sudan, and Guinea, with Mozambique, Congo-Brazzaville, the Central African Republic, and others.

Opportunities for the New Administration

With this foundation, let me return to my earlier assertion that Africa policy is an area of great opportunity for the new Administration.

In Rhodesia, before 1979, it was possible for the Ian Smith government to cling to the hope that a conservative government in Britain might lessen the pressure for true majority rule. Instead, the Thatcher government upheld that principle with renewed vigor. It took the lead in new negotiations. As a result a settlement was achieved.

There are a number of areas where similar leadership by a Reagan Administration could have similar effects. Let me list some of them, not to second-guess the new President's priorities, but as illustrations.

In Zimbabwe, America has a strong interest in seeing the settlement succeed. Thus it is sound policy to offer the assistance that is badly needed to assure lasting peace and stability.

After a long and bitter conflict, Zimbabwe faces a massive task of reconstruction. Prime Minister Mugabe has embarked on a course of national reconstruction and reconciliation—to build a permanent peace by bringing the economic and social benefits of peace to the lives of people, black and white. Yet the strains in Zimbabwe are still severe. Our aid can help make a difference.

Elsewhere in southern Africa, the conflict in Zimbabwe devastated the economies of surrounding countries. The nations of southern Africa are now combining to restore economic health to the region. They have asked the West to join them in this effort. The first meeting among western and southern African nations on regional development took place last week in Mozambique.

American and Western interests could be greatly furthered by strong and active participation in southern African regional development and by the expansion of our trade and investment throughout the region.

In Namibia a peaceful settlement of a long and tragic conflict is now within reach. A date of March 1 has been set for implementation of the agreed settlement plan. Next month, the parties will meet to discuss final arrangements.

The hour of decision has come for South Africa. If the Namibia settlement is implemented, it will bring peace and stability to South Africa's borders, where a needless conflict is now costing South African lives and is providing ever greater opportunities for outside intervention.

A new American Administration can argue with special force that it is in South Africa's own interest to stay on course and implement a settlement.

A Namibia settlement would fundamentally alter South African relations with neighboring states and with the international community. A settlement would prove that outside nations can work constructively with South Africa toward peaceful change and multiracial cooperation. On the other hand, if South Africa refuses to allow the settlement to go forward, its isolation in the world will become more acute.

South Africa has expressed concern about the impartiality of a U.N. settlement in Namibia. I would note, however, that South Africa's own administrators, civil servants, and police will continue to function in Namibia during the elections. It is important to remember also the fairness, integrity, and understanding with which U.N. representatives have conducted recent Namibian negotiations, as well as the standards of fairness which the United Nations has consistently followed in its peacekeeping around the world. Finally, we Western nations which proposed the settlement are wholly committed to fair elections. Our national honor as well as our national interests are involved.

And in South Africa itself, the question remains whether change will come through racial conflict or through negotiated progress. But change will come. It will come principally because mounting internal pressures will become irresistable.

It is in the interest of the United States to encourage early, meaningful change in South Africa. We cannot provide a timetable or blueprint. That is for the people of South Africa—all the people, working together—to decide for themselves. But the new American Administration can be effective in encouraging progress in those areas where South African blacks are appealing for early change, and where many South African whites are receptive. We must find concrete ways to support the efforts of those working for peaceful change through South Africa's churches, community organizations, newspapers, and courts. We could assist those South African efforts financially and through the activities of our companies, churches, universities, and unions.

These are but a few ideas, concentrated on southern Africa. If our new Administration were to embrace the essential thrust of these policies, a fundamental continuity in our policy would be assured, our credibility in Africa would be enhanced, and our bonds of friendship throughout Africa would be strengthened.

In conclusion, let me stress a fundamental point. As it affects the fate of the nations of Africa, American policy in the future will be important, but it will not be decisive. The major determinants will be internal—the quality of leadership, their economic choices, their political will.

Where our policy will be decisive is in determining the kind of relations America can have with evolving African societies. In short, it is our own interests and our own future at stake in the quality of our approach to Africa.

As we change Administrations, I think all Americans can agree on this fundamental premise—that we want to sustain constructive relations with the countries of Africa; relations that uphold our interests and theirs and the ideals that draw us together. ■

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